

Refuge From Strife of Tongues

by J.R. Miller

We must find refuge from the strife of tongues by keeping love in our heart and seeking God's presence.

Scripture: Proverbs 18:21, James 3:6

Topics: "The Power of Words", "Finding Refuge in God"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound impact of our words, highlighting that the tongue can be a source of both life and death, as stated in Proverbs 18:21. He discusses the pervasive strife of tongues in society, where careless and unloving speech can harm individuals and relationships, even within families. Miller encourages believers to seek refuge in God's presence amidst this turmoil, advocating for a heart filled with love and a commitment to speak words that uplift and encourage. He reminds us that, like Jesus, we can remain unscathed by the strife of tongues by maintaining love in our hearts and praying for those who speak ill of us. Ultimately, he calls for a conscious effort to contribute wholesome words to the world, countering the negativity that often surrounds us.

Transcript

"Life and death are in the power of the tongue!" Proverbs 18:21

"The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man--but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison!" James 3:6-8

"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken!" Matthew 12:36

There is a great deal of power for evil in human speech. Few people altogether escape the hurt of tongues. No name is pure enough to be forever safe against vile insinuations, or cruel aspersions. Even Jesus, whose life was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners--did not escape the slanderer's tongue. It is astonishing, how much unloving speech there is in this world. On the smallest provocation men become angry, and speak violent words. Even those who profess to be Christ's, too often lose control of their speech, and say words which cut like swords! There are homes in which the principal talk is wrangling--the strife of tongues. There are children with tender souls who grow up in the midst of harsh contentions, scarcely ever hearing a gentle or loving word.

Then there is a strife of tongues around us--even when the words are not spoken against us. Think of all the speech one must hear as the days go by, speech that is not loving, helpful, encouraging, comforting. The gift of speech is one of the noblest gifts that God has given to man. It was meant to be loving, true, wise, enriching, and full of blessing. God gave us our tongues that with them we might speak to Him in prayer, praise, and worship; and speak to our fellow-men in gladness, in love, in hope, in all helpful words.

Our Lord has told us that for every idle word that men speak they must give account. For every careless word! Notice that it is not for every sinful word, every bitter word, every false word, or every impure word kindling unholy suggestions which may burst into flame and leave the whole life blackened. Of course, for such words--words that lead to sin, we must give account. But Jesus said that we must give account for every careless word we speak. Think of the careless words to which we have to listen! What is the larger part of the conversation that goes on in homes, at work, and during social interaction? Is it wise, good, wholesome, useful talk? Does it instruct, interest, inspire, stimulate? People chatter on forever--and do not say one word worth remembering. Yet we cannot get away from this strife of tongues.

It is full of misrepresentations, too; reflections on the absent, innuendoes, suspicions, criticisms, censures. It is strange how much of the talk we hear is about those who are absent, and with what ruthless unconcern people say evil things of those who are not present to hear. Characters are discussed and dissected as if they were nothing more than bits of clay! Names are taken up and gossiping tongues whisper their hints of scandal--even by those who have just walked out of church! Reputations are blighted. It is the rarest thing that a full, hearty, honest word--is spoken of any absent one. Evermore this sad chatter about people goes on in society. We cannot but hear it, for we are not deaf; but if we are honorable, charitable, and true-hearted, these words hurt us! We need a refuge from them.

"The strife of tongues!" How truly these words picture the life which is around everyone of us! And men and women with sensitive spirits grow weary of it, and long to flee away to some quiet retreat, where they shall no longer be hurt by the unending strife. So much inharmonious talk harms us. We grow tired of hearing criticism and faultfinding. It worries and frets us--to be nagged at continually. It pains us to know that those we have trusted as friends--should have spoken of us with such careless tongue. It grieves us to learn that we have been misjudged, our motives misconstrued, our actions misunderstood, our own words perverted and their meaning misrepresented! We get weary of all this, and sometimes wish we had wings like a dove, that we might fly away and be at rest!

The same Psalm that gives us the picture of the strife of tongues--also unveils the refuge we need from all this confusion of words. "You hide them in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them. You shelter them in your presence, far from the strife tongues." Psalm 31:20

God has provided a refuge into which we may flee, where we shall not be hurt by the strife of tongues. What is the refuge?

It is not by falling in ourselves with this stream of talk, that we escape its hurt. That would be our danger. When we are with those who have only careless words, empty chit-chat, on their tongues--it is easy for us to join them in the frivolous speech. When we hear others gossiping about their neighbors, telling bits of news, repeating derogatory stories, hinting suspicious things--we find it quite natural to enjoy it all--and then to add our portion to the common stock. When we are among those who are saying unkindly things of another, casting arrows of censure, sneer, or sarcasm at the good name of an absent person, making his faults a subject of conversation, holding a sort of clinic over his character, and dissecting it for their own

wicked delight--how easily we slip into the same groove of talk, unless we are most watchful.

Who has never caught himself laughing at the things people were saying about some dear friend of his, and even adding little bits which his own confidential relation of friendship had permitted him to learn about his friend? Or when we find ourselves among those who are wrangling over questions, or quarreling about creeds or politics, or something else, it is not hard for us to take sides and wrangle as vigorously as the others. In a home where strife is going on--we are always in danger of entering into and adding to the bitterness by our own excited and exciting words.

This is not the refuge from the strife of tongues, which God provides. It may be the easiest thing just to drop into the stream, and drift along with it--but we are only hurt if we do this thinking to save ourselves from the evil of other men's sins. We are deserting our colors and going over to the enemy. We may not surrender to the strife of tongues to get clear of the pain the strife causes. We must be witnesses for Christ. If others all around us sin with their tongues, we must be sure that we honor our Master either in speech or by our silence.

Nor may we seek a refuge from the strife of tongues, by stoic indifference. If the talk we hear concerns ourselves and is condemnatory, we would do well first to ask whether it be true, whether the things said of us may not have at least some shadow of truth in them. It is well for many of us that we must live in an atmosphere of criticism. If others always spoke well of us, invariably commending us--it would make us proud and self-conceited. It is well for us, that there always are those about us who are ready to see our faults--and are not afraid to expose them.

One has said: "If any speak ill of you, flee home to your own conscience and examine your heart. If you are guilty, it is a just correction; if not guilty, it is a fair instruction. Make use of both. So shall you distill honey out of gall; and out of an open enemy, create a secret friend."

Nor is the divine refuge from the strife of tongues, found in flight from society. It may be the easiest thing to take the wings of a dove and fly away. Men have run to the covert of the rocks and the caverns, to the convent or the monastery, to the hermit's cell, to escape this unhallowed strife. But that is not the way God wants us to live. He needs us in the heart of society, for He desires us to witness for Him. We are to let our light shine upon the world's darkness to dispel it. We are to live among those who are ungodly--to show them a pattern of true, holy and beautiful living. You find yourself, for example, in an ungodly home. The spirit of love has not been cultivated, and there is a strife of tongues even in that sacred sanctuary. The uncongenial life is hurting you. You feel like fleeing from it. But probably it is your duty to stay there. You must therefore find your refuge in the midst of the very uncongenialities which make the home so hard a place for you to live in.

The same is true of most of our environments. We cannot flee out of them. Our duty requires us to stay where we are. God wants us--where He has placed us. Flight from the environment would be flight from duty; we would thus prove disloyal to our Master, and fail in our search for shelter. But there is a refuge which we can find in the very midst of the strife of tongues.

They tell us that when the dreadful cyclone sweeps over a country, there is a spot at its center which is so quiet and still that a leaf is scarcely stirred, where a baby might sleep undisturbed. Just so, at the center of the sorest strife of tongues, we may find a pavilion, a place of peace, where no hurt can come to us.

How can we find it? First by having the peace of God in our own heart. If we are in right relations with God, His bosom is our refuge. In the time of strife we can always turn to Him--and in His presence, in His love, our heart can be at rest.

We must also keep our heart ever warm and loving toward those who make the uncongenial environment. Nothing they do must disturb our love for them. If we live thus, we shall have a pavilion in which God will ever hide us from the strife of tongues. The strife will cause pain--but it will not mar the sweetness of our spirit.

There are flowers which grow in the early spring under the snow-drifts, and are not hurt by the cold. Just so will the graces of the heart be kept tender, beautiful, and sweet--amid the harshest uncongenialities, even beneath unkindnesses and cruelties, if we have this refuge of God's love into which to flee.

One secret of security from the hurt of tongues--is the keeping of love in the heart. Slanders or bitter words of any kind can harm us--only when we yield to the feeling of resentment and anger. So long as we continue loving through all the strife--we are hidden away in a safe refuge. It is bitterness which opens the door of our heart, and lets harm in. The sin is not in being tempted--but in yielding to the temptation. Our Lord taught us to pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us. While we pray for them--their cruel words have no power to hurt us.

We have in Jesus Christ, the highest example of the truth of this lesson. Never about any other life did the strife of words rage as it raged about Him. Men's cruelty knew no limit. Poisoned tongues emptied their most envenomed bitterness about Him. They uttered the vilest charges against Him. They made the worst accusations against His character. They pursued Him with the keenest malice. Falsehood did its worst--in defaming Him!

But none of these things hurt Him. He kept His sweetness of spirit, His serenity of soul, through all the strife of words. If we look at His refuge, we find that, first, He kept love in His heart through all the strife. He never grew impatient. No bitterness ever entered His soul, no anger, no feeling of resentment. He never once returned hate for hate--but only and always love for hate. While the men were driving the nails in His hands and feet, He was praying for them! "Father, forgive them!" His love never ebbed for a moment.

We can stay in God's pavilion and be safe from the hurt of the strife of tongues--only when we keep ourselves in the love of God. If we grow angry and speak unadvisedly, or let our heart grow bitter and our lips utter words of unkindness or resentment, we have sinned. Then the strife has hurt us. We must love on and pray on, and seek the good of those who are treating us so bitterly.

The language of the Psalm is very beautiful. "You shall hide them" Your children, Your believing ones "in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them. You shelter them in your presence, far from the strife tongues." That is, when the world wrongs us, or assails us with its darts of evil--God hides us in the secret of His own presence.

When a child comes in from the street, alarmed, trembling, from the midst of evil that has threatened it, the mother draws it close to her own side; into the secret of her own presence, and holds it there until fear is quieted and all danger is past. That is the way Christ does when His little ones are trembling and afraid in the midst of the strife of tongues. A New Testament verse says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." What need we be concerned about the world's worst of rage, falsehood, calumny, and unkindness, when we are thus hidden in God! Men cannot hurt the stars--by flinging stones at them; the stars are hidden in God's

heavenly refuge. No strife of tongues can hurt us--if we are in God's pavilion of love!

We cannot get away from the assailing of men's tongues. We must hear much speech that hurts or wounds, and much that wearies and saddens us. But we can be so hidden in Christ, so wrapped in the folds of His garments, so held in His heart of hearts--that the strife shall not touch us. He will hide us in the secret of His presence, safe from those who conspire against us. He will keep us secretly in His pavilion, from the strife of tongues.

There is ever need for fresh lessons on the duty of loving speech. We should do our part to quell the strife of tongues in this world. This we can do, in some measure at least, by guarding our own lips that they never add to the volume of this unholy strife. We can fulfill our duty yet more adequately, if we continually put into the stream of speech sweet words, wholesome words, words that will prove healing, inspiring, strengthening, encouraging!

There is always a mission for wholesome words. Incalculable is their power to bless. Immeasurable, too, is the possibility of helpfulness in these tongues of ours. Bitter will it be--if it be found in the end, that we have failed to use our speech to bless the world. There is need for wholesome words in all human associations. We are afraid to say kind, appreciative things to each other, even to those we love the best. We keep the gentle thoughts sealed up along the years, until our friend is gone. Then by his coffin--our lips are unsealed, when true words, warm with love, flow out. But of what use are they then? We might as well keep them sealed up!

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